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SENEGAL

Dateline Dakar

May 2005

Moving toward peace in Senegal's southern Casamance region

The Casamance peace process is gaining momentum, but more work is needed to secure lasting peace. In January 2005, the Government of Senegal (GOS) and the Movement of Democratic Forces in the Casamance (MFDC) signed a treaty that launched the first round of discussions to address key political aspects of the conflict and future development and reconstruction.

A second round of talks scheduled for March, however, has been postponed indefinitely because the two parties are not adequately prepared for discussions. USAID is addressing this need for capacity building with a series of innovative workshops.

USAID, in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy, is supporting a team of international and local experts to build the capacity of key stakeholders to engage in fruitful negotiations and conflict resolution through a series of targeted training workshops. Participant groups include senior



Residents in the southern village of Mpack have benefited from USAID support in rebuilding their homes left abandoned during a conflict spanning two decades.

Photo: Richard Nyberg, USAID/Senegal

leaders, journalists, and key rebel leaders and their negotiating team members.

The overwhelming positive reaction to the workshop has far exceeded expectations. Participants have learned valuable negotiation skills and are motivated to take action. The GOS is so convinced as to the value of the workshop that it has requested additional training for both senior government officials and MFDC representatives. Participants from civil society groups have begun implementing activities aimed at furthering the peace process using the expertise gained in the workshops. For example, a group of NGOs is developing a set of radio messages on the peace process and disseminating peace-building messages. Another community is working to reconcile MFDC rebels with the villages they pillaged.

One challenge that remains to be overcome is rising tension within the MFDC military wing. Fortunately, the majority of the Casamance population is resolute in its desire for peace.

The USG is well positioned to continue offering support to the peace process. Over the past five years, the USG has built a solid relationship with the GOS, the Casamance population, and the MFDC, based on the stance of neutrality which it adopted vis-à-vis the conflict. As a leading donor in the Casamance since 2000, USAID has acquired an in-



People in the Casamance benefit from small loans through village banks supported by USAID.

Photo: Richard Nyberg, USAID/Senegal

GOS policy makers and their negotiation team members; leaders from civil society organizations, which include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), traditional and religious

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depth understanding of the complex cultural, political, and economic layers of the conflict. By supporting the Casamance peace process, the USG is playing a pivotal role in fostering a lasting solution to the conflict and bringing greater overall prosperity to Senegal.

USAID natural resources program extends to the Casamance

USAID's agriculture and natural resources management program, known locally as Wula Nafa (meaning riches from the forest), has launched its activities in the southern



Senegal's valuable baobab fruit.
Photo: R. Nyberg/USAID

Casamance region.

USAID, which has worked to support natural products in the regions of Kolda and Tambacounda, is currently identifying potential natural products to promote on local and international markets. It is also working with local partners, government officials and communities to develop forest management plans benefiting local populations who live in and around

these forests.

USAID's track record in promotion of locally-produced natural products is strong. Last year, revenues from partner enterprises increased by 160 percent for the following markets: bamboo, baobab fruit, laalo mbep (gum used for cooking), fonio (a local cereal), honey and jujube (a tart fruit eaten fresh or dry). In baobab alone, 140 tons of the fruit, used in the cosmetic industry, was exported to Europe benefiting 115 women's groups.

USAID strengthens parliament in Guinea-Bissau

On May 10, USAID/Senegal Director Olivier Carduner signed an agreement with Guinea-Bissau's Minister of Finance, Joao Aladje Fadia, worth \$280,000 to help the National Assembly consolidate the democratic process in the West African country.

Under the agreement, USAID/Senegal in its role as a "twinning" mission responsible for activities in Guinea-Bissau as well as Cape Verde, The Gambia and Mauritania, will provide technical assistance, equipment, and training to help the

elected parliamentarians effectively control various programs and state. Another objective of this USAID support is to enhance lines of communication between the National Assembly and civil society.

Since gaining national independence in 1976, Guinea-Bissau has benefited from U.S. Government assistance in its efforts to foster economic and social development. Some key areas of support include agriculture, private sector development, most notably through processing, marketing and export of cashew nuts; health, in particular, HIV/AIDS awareness; education, and good governance.

USAID increases interest and expertise in public-private partnerships

USAID is currently carrying out a range of activities to help enable the Government of Senegal to develop and nurture successful public-private partnerships (PPPs). A study on the feasibility of using PPPs in Senegal and follow-up workshops and technical assistance have convinced government, private sector, and civil society partners of the advantages of using the private sector to improve services, build infrastructure, and use these methods to accelerate economic growth.

More importantly, this increased understanding resulted in the GOS taking the decision to create a special unit responsible for developing PPPs. In addition, the GOS made public-private partnerships a cornerstone for the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) proposal that it has submitted to the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). Senegal's development of sound PPP ideas and structures for its MCA Compact will prove crucial to its chances in winning Compact approval and developing activities to encourage investment that should bring substantial economic growth.



USAID/Senegal Director Olivier Carduner (right) and Joao Aladje Fadia, Minister of Finance (left) sign an agreement to strengthen skills of parliamentarians. Also pictured is Satu Camara, Vice President of the Guinea-Bissau's National Assembly Photo: Massar Beye, USAID/Senegal